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CERTAIN HOPEFUL TENDENCIES IN TODAY'S THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT.

THERE are few persons acquainted with the currents of today's thought who will deny that the present is a period of theological transition altogether unique. Just what the outcome may be no one can as yet quite foresee, although one's expectations will be determined very largely by his circumstances and temperament. On the one side there are those who see in the present only signs of approaching evil and misery, the decay of the church, and the passing of anything like real religion. For our own part, we sympathize to a considerable degree with this foreboding. All the facts at our disposal seem to argue that the condition of organized Christianity is certainly critical, and that there is danger lest, in the transition through which we are passing, there may be lost, not merely the misconceptions and errors of the past, but also, at least temporarily, the very bases of religion and morality. But these forebodings, in our judgment, are more than counterbalanced by certain very hopeful tendencies in the theological world, and it is to some of these that we would call our readers' attention.

First of all, there is the acquisition of the scientific temper. One uses the term "scientific" in this connection with a certain degree of hesitation. Some scholars have prided themselves rather extravagantly on the fact that their method is that of science, while that of their opponents is not, and, as a consequence, in the theological world the term has acquired a certain flavor of self-confidence, if not

HOPEFUL
ELEMENTS IN
TODAY'S
TRANSITIONS

1. THE
SCIENTIFIC
TEMPER

arrogance, which has justly won for it suspicion. At the same time, however, it is a term which stands for an attitude of mind which cannot be too highly estimated. The habit of searching first for facts, the readiness to welcome every fact and to make one's general statements only after complete inductions—these it is that constitute the scientific temper and in theological thought promise results of value and permanence. Who but the man who lets his doctrines wait upon his facts can ever be quite free from a haunting suspicion lest the presupposition with which he begins to investigate may itself some time be found untenable?

In the second place, the induction lying below present theological thought is rapidly growing wider. Theology has now at its disposal a vast accumulation of facts furnished it by psychology, sociology, anthropology, archæology, comparative religion, and history, as well as those sciences that deal with the Bible directly. Thanks to this great field of induction, we know today better than ever before, for instance, that religion is an integral and characteristic element of human life, and that therefore the Christian teacher has just as legitimate a function as the statesman or the physician. More than that, through the results of these sciences the religious teacher sees, with an ever-increasing clearness, the conditions under which he works. The peculiarly Christian truths which he has to teach have acquired a new significance and adaptability to the needs of men, and he can enforce them with new confidence.

**2. WIDE
INDUCTION
AS A BASIS
OF THEOLOGY**

Again, the method in theological work also is one to bring confidence. It is not merely that the Bible is studied as profoundly as other literatures, but that those methods which have given positive results in other fields may be expected to do the same in the field of biblical investigation. In this particular the last few years have seen a very decided advance. The free and easy methods of rationalism have been discredited by the methodical processes of historical criticism, and criticism itself has in good measure outgrown its early crudities and extravagances, and seems in a fair way to grow still more sedate as it grows more mature.

**3. A CORRECT
METHOD**

The great lines of investigation are tending toward a general consensus as to results, and, at least among workers who have received a genuine historical training, the naïveté which confused ingenuity with truth is disappearing, and it is not too much to expect that before many years the legitimacy of the historical method of studying the Bible, with its recognition of evolutionary processes, will be universally admitted by intelligent students.

Another hopeful tendency in the theological movement is its recognition of the moral aspects of its mission. There was a time, not so very long ago, when theology was a scholastic pursuit, while the liberal thinker was apt to minimize the darker moral facts, and to excuse rather than to condemn sin. In large measure this has disappeared. It is true that there are men under the influence of certain philosophical conceptions who still think of sin as a matter of incomplete development, but indifferentism is growing less frequent among theological teachers. No body of men is more intensely interested in the problems of social reform than the younger theologians, while in the sphere of individual life wickedness is allowed every day fewer euphemistic synonyms. The theologian, although he may still be drawn toward metaphysical distinctions and definitions, is in deadly earnest; he feels that the world needs its God, not merely to win a heaven, but to cure its wickedness. And he is bent upon training men, both in church and school, to aid the world satisfy its need.

But, above all, the most hopeful tendency of today's theology is its return to Jesus Christ. By the methods of study they have adopted, men have been convinced that he was no myth; and, although the very universality of this new confidence in his historical existence has led to divergent philosophical descriptions of his character, the slightest acquaintance with recent religious literature will show one that now as never before Jesus is a factor in religious thought. The process by which his supremacy has been reestablished has, it is true, been attended by the loss of assurance in

4. MORAL
EARNESTNESS
IN TEACHING

5. LOYALTY TO
JESUS CHRIST

certain dogmas, and by the transfer of argument from metaphysics to the positive results of methodical investigation; but this is only to increase the apologetic strength of Christianity. And it should be borne in mind that, speaking broadly, but with special reference to the powerful Ritschlian movement, this new confidence in Jesus concerns not only his teachings, but his significance as a revelation of God in human life. It would perhaps not be quite correct to say that the tendency of modern Christology is in the direction of the orthodoxy of scholastic theology, but even less is it in the direction of those easy generalizations made before the rise of critical schools, which classified Jesus with Socrates and Confucius. Indeed, one may even go a step farther, and say that in spirit, if not in formula, the tendency in modern theology is evangelistic. The unique supremacy of Jesus has become something more than a mere intellectual matter. It is furnishing the basis and the message of the new moral earnestness. Men are looking to Jesus as never before as the one who can bring righteousness into today's life, and whose spirit, once appropriated, will be the source both of social and of individual regeneration. With new faith they are taking him at his word, and are coming to the Father through him.

In the light of these facts, is it not time for a more aggressive presentation of religion? Should not our religious teachers cease giving their people various makeshifts for the gospel, and, with a zeal born of confidence, bring men and women face to face with the great moral and religious elements of their own nature, and with Jesus Christ as the one who can satisfy their deepest religious wants and energize their better selves? We plead for an immediate revival of the preaching, not of all the forms—Judaistic, Gnostic, and Stoic—in which the apostles couched their gospel, but of the preaching of that which really was their gospel—the facts and the significance of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

*A PLEA FOR
AGGRESSIVE
EVANGELIZATION*